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SUBJECT: EGYPT MEPI UPDATE: SMALL GRANTS, RURAL OUTREACH, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

¶1. Summary: Highlights of MEPI activities in Egypt during the first half of 2008 include six new small grants for projects with aims including democracy promotion in schools and strengthening workers' associations; a USDA regional Food Defense workshop; outreach to Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta; interviews for Tomorrow's Leaders scholarships and Middle East Entrepreneur Training; consultations on university partnerships; and a web chat with enthusiastic if puzzled young Egyptians. End summary.

Small Grants

¶2. During the first half of 2008, we received 23 small-grant applications from NGOs throughout Egypt addressing all MEPI pillars: democracy, economic reform, education, and women's empowerment. After local vetting and vetting by MEPI in Tunis, six of the projects are proceeding, in addition to five still under consideration and three continuing from last year. Our new projects include training for labor activists in organizational skills and conflict resolution, promotion of women's political participation in Upper Egypt, production of a play on freedom and democratic values to be staged in youth centers throughout Egypt, and reporting on the conduct of the April local elections through interviews with voters. As we integrate MEPI activities with the overall work of the economic and political section, six reporting officers have volunteered to serve as project officers for the new grants. In addition, we intend to work with some of the unsuccessful but promising applicants such as Businesswomen's Association in Dakahlia and the Port Said Small and Medium Enterprise Association to help them develop projects that meet MEPI objectives.

Outreach to Upper Egypt, Nile Delta

¶3. In February, we traveled to rural areas of Aswan governorate to meet the small-grant applicant Association of the Development of Women in Naga'a Helal and discuss potential collaboration with the Community Development Association. In the city of Aswan, we met with the Women's Renaissance Association, Egyptians without Borders, and the Future Association for Development to discuss their work, MEPI programs, and overall political and economic conditions in Upper Egypt. We made a similar trip to Damietta, Port Said and rural areas in the Nile Delta region June 16-17 as part of our efforts to increase MEPI participation outside of Cairo.

Food Defense Workshop

¶4. The U.S. Department of Agriculture organized a MEPI-funded workshop "Protecting the Middle East Food Supply from Intentional Contamination" in Cairo in January. The workshop included presentations by experts from the United States, Europe, and Egypt to government and private-sector

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participants from throughout the region, focusing on the prevention of malicious tampering in the food storage and distribution chains nationally, regionally, and worldwide.

Scholarships and Leadership Training

¶5. We interviewed 43 students who applied to the Summer Leadership Institute, a six-week intensive leadership training program for college undergraduates. Six - four women and two men from across Egypt - are now scheduled to attend the program, which will start June 30 with a two-day orientation in Washington D.C., followed by a four-week academic residency program at a U.S. university and a two-week educational study tour.

¶6. We also interviewed 11 students in February for four-year scholarships for Egyptian applicants to study abroad at the American University in Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU) in Beirut. (Lebanese students were eligible to apply for scholarships to the American University in Cairo but were not part of this selection panel.) Four Egyptians were selected to attend either AUB or LAU beginning the fall of 2008.

Middle East Entrepreneurship Training (MEET)

¶7. The Beyster Institute of the University of California-San Diego hosted a two-week workshop in Alexandria in March for 20 leaders of civil society organizations from throughout the region. The workshop offered

training on
developing a business plan, strategic and tactical planning, and
other guidance
related to starting up or streamlining civil society organizations.
Three
Egyptians were among the 20 participants.

¶8. We participated in interviews of 22 Egyptian candidates for the
MEET Senior
Executive, Civil Society Organization, and Industry Specific
programs. The
Beyster Institute ultimately approved five candidates from Egypt for
the
programs.

Web Chat

¶9. In February, Public Affairs and MEPI fielded on-line questions
from young
Egyptians interested in study in the United States, concerned about
the equity
of the selection process for scholarships, and puzzled by a range of
topics
relating to MEPI programs and grants, exchange programs,
fellowships,
scholarships, and internships. We explained the programs and did
what we could
to alleviate their anxieties. Despite their uncertainty, the young
Egyptians
needed no encouragement to pursue these opportunities, demonstrating
a high
degree of interest in studying in the United States and enthusiasm
about MEPI
programs.

¶10. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.
SCOBEY